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TAGS: PGOV PREL AO  
SUBJECT: ANGOLA: GRA EXTENDS VOTER REGISTRATION PERIOD

REF: A. Luanda 622

¶B. Luanda 496 and previous

¶1. (U) Summary: Citing the logistical difficulties caused by the country's war ravaged infrastructure and an unusually heavy rainy season, the Council of Ministers extended the voter registration period from June 15th to September 15, 2007. Government spokesmen repeatedly stated that the extension won't affect current plans for 2008 Legislative elections and 2009 Presidential elections, but opposition leaders remain unconvinced. While the GRA could be blamed for poor planning, it is clear that this extension is necessary to ensure broad participation in upcoming elections. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Council of Ministers approved a 90-day extension to the voter registration period on May 30, 2007. The registration period, originally slated to end on June 15th, is now set to end on September 15, 2007. The Council of Ministers' decision was based on recommendations from the National Electoral Commission (CNE) and the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Electoral Process (CIPE). The GRA plans to use this extension time to expand coverage in rural and urban areas and hit its goal of 7.5 million registered voters; 5.1 Angolans had registered as of May 31st. CIPE Director Virgilo de Fontes Perreira confirmed that once the registration period ends on September 15 the verification and correction of the electoral books will commence and conclude on November 30, 2007. He further stated that the extension will not affect the GRA's plans to hold Legislative elections in 2008 (no exact date yet announced).

¶3. (SBU) Civil society, religious leaders, and the major opposition parties, including UNITA, also called for an extension, stating that many people in key areas of support had not yet had an opportunity to register. Nonetheless, opposition support for an extension comes with concern that the GRA could utilize the extension to postpone elections, and the opposition parties have made it clear that they do not support further electoral delays.

¶4. (SBU) Background: The Electoral Registration law allows the government to periodically launch new voter registration periods if it believes that sufficient numbers of unregistered voters exist - people who didn't have a chance to register previously because they were sick, underage, out of the country, etc. The electoral rolls must also be verified annually. Some opposition leaders are skeptical that the 90-day extension could be the prelude to seeking a "new" registration process, and that the time-consuming execution and verification of this process will be a pretext to once again delay elections. Opposition leaders state that delays favor the MPLA, as the MPLA hopes to gain electoral support through the completion of large public works and social welfare projects around the country. Opposition leaders told A/S Frazer during her Luanda visit that by commission or omission they don't believe CIPE has sent sufficient registration brigades out to areas known to be pro-opposition, and that the MPLA is encouraging CIPE to slow down the registration in pro-opposition areas (Reftel A).

¶5. (SBU) Comment: While the opposition welcomes every opportunity to hold the GRA's feet to the fire and offer up their suspicions of

political machinations by the MPLA, their top priority is getting their supporters registered. The need for an extension has been obvious for months. Both political parties and civil society - entities the GRA calls "important partners" in civic education - have repeatedly called for an extension. In the end the GRA showed it lacked the capacity to pull off its tech-heavy registration process in six months as planned, but all sides agree that widespread participation in the electoral process is key for the continued consolidation of peace. End comment.  
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